

## Introduction

### Rethinking Medieval Translation

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Why might medieval translation need rethinking? Why ethics, why politics? In one sense, after all, medievalists are arguably ahead of the game when it comes to exploring the political and ethical dimensions of translation. The Latin concept of *translatio*, which assumed from at least the ninth century an explicit cultural meaning through its association with the model of *translatio studii et imperii*, has long been linked with ideas of translation as an ideological as well as a more narrowly linguistic or textual phenomenon. French monarchs, following the death of Charlemagne, sought to assert claims to cultural and political superiority by proving their credentials as the inheritors of *imperium* (power or legitimacy) from Rome and of *studium* (knowledge or learning) from ancient Greece and Rome. Just as political power had transferred first from Greece to the Roman Empire, and then in turn to the Holy Roman Empire under Charlemagne, so now it was France which, according to this logic, inherited the supreme power of its imperial forebears; vernacular translations of classical texts likewise affirmed their ability to appropriate the power and cultural prestige of the ancients. Similarly, the *translatio imperii* topos was used to justify royal legitimacy in Norman England: the myth of Brutus, 'first' king of Britain and descendant of Rome's Trojan founder Aeneas, secured for Anglo-Norman monarchs a line of descent that also extended back to ancient Greece and Rome. Paradoxically these genealogical impulses went hand in hand with an effort to displace those previous centres of power and knowledge: what purported to be an unbroken lineage was also characterized in practice by various modes of appropriation, substitution, rupture and reinvention. While

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purportedly ensuring continuity and succession, in other words, *translatio* more often than not entailed contestation and suppression.<sup>1</sup>

In light of these tendencies, it is difficult to conceive of a theory of cultural transmission in the Middle Ages that is not, in some way, bound up with the senses of *translatio* associated with early articulations of empire and the ethical and political issues this inevitably raises. Medievalists are perhaps, for this reason, particularly attuned to matters that have since been debated in contemporary translation studies concerning the translator's role as interpreter or author of the text; the ability of translation to reinforce or unsettle linguistic or political hegemony; and translation's capacity for establishing cultural contact or participating in cultural appropriation or effacement. As will be discussed in the second section of this Introduction, there has already been productive interaction between medieval studies and translation studies in many of these key areas. One of the purposes of this volume is to further the dialogue between these fields and to suggest directions for future inquiry. Given the centrality of ethical and political issues both to the medieval notion of *translatio* and to recent discussions of translation in contemporary translation studies, this is one area where the interface between modern theory and research on medieval translation is – and might continue to be – enormously productive. This collection thus seeks to draw out and re-examine significant points of overlap in the ways these fields conceive of the politics and ethics of translation, as well as areas of productive tension and disagreement.

The issues arising from the mutual implication of translation and empire have acquired a particular urgency in recent years with the emergence of postcolonial criticism as a distinct field of literary and cultural analysis. Jacques Derrida's claim that all culture is at base colonial – that 'toute culture s'institue par l'imposition unilatérale de quelque "politique" de la langue' [every culture institutes itself through the unilateral imposition of some 'politics' of language] – directs attention to issues that were also being taken up by a number of other theorists, historians and critics in

1 For an overview of the concept of *translatio*, its deployment in the context of the *translatio studii et imperii* formula, and its uneasy relationship with genealogy, see Zrinka Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies of the French Middle Ages: Translatio, Kinship, and Metaphor* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 142–89. Deployments of *translatio* as a metaphor in the Middle Ages nonetheless arguably contrast with the metaphorical applications of translation in contemporary global culture. For a comparative analysis of medieval and modern metaphors of translation, see Zrinka Stahuljak, 'An Epistemology of Tension: Translation and Multiculturalism', *The Translator* 10, no. 1 (2004): 33–57. Rita Copeland uses the *translatio studii et imperii* model as a framework for analysing vernacular translations of Latin texts, which are similarly implicated in a dynamic of rupture and displacement. See Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

the 1990s concerning identity, cultural mastery, linguistic agency and colonial power-play.<sup>2</sup> Yet, as explored later in this Introduction, medievalists too have been interested in pursuing translation's role as a site for the imposition of cultural dominance, whether in the context of the face-off between Latin and vernacular texts or, as in more recent scholarship, focusing on multilingual encounters in relation to the transmission of texts within and between vernacular languages. Furthermore it has been easier – at least in principle – for medievalists to avoid the evaluative tendencies that continue to condition some modern assumptions about translation. If, in contemporary publishing cultures, translations commonly get judged according to how 'good', 'bad' or – as Derrida puts it – 'relevant' they are, then this will not necessarily have the same meaning in manuscript cultures where evidence for assessing a translator's performance is potentially less secure or stable.<sup>3</sup> The evaluative approach assumes that translations can be traced back to an originary 'source', that translation is always a second-order phenomenon, and that its success as a transmitter of meaning resides in its ability to keep faith with the 'original' from which it derives. This hierarchy of original and copy, with its associated rhetoric of fidelity and error, equates language use explicitly with moral value: translations are assessed in terms of right and wrong. Additionally, it may sometimes be symptomatic of a problematically

2 Jacques Derrida, *Le monolinguisme de l'autre, ou la prothèse d'origine* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), 68; Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 39. Reflections on the politics of language in the 1990s, which take up or are inspired by the expanded senses of translation pursued by Derrida, include Eric Cheyfitz, *The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization from 'The Tempest' to 'Tarzan'* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991; repr. 1997); Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994). Ruth Evans, 'Translating Past Cultures?' in *The Medieval Translator 4*, ed. Roger Ellis and Ruth Evans (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994), 20–45, considers how the foregrounding of translation as a metaphor of cultural in-betweenness in postcolonial studies might provide a means reshaping medieval scholarship, even as studies such as Copeland's were already placing the cultural dimensions of translation firmly on the agenda through discussion of the *translatio studii et imperii* model.

3 Sometimes, for example, we simply do not have access to the precise exemplars for a given translation or indeed to a 'fair copy' (to deploy a further layer of moralizing vocabulary) of the translated text itself, making judgements of a translation's quality particularly challenging. On ideas of 'relevance' in translation, see Jacques Derrida, 'Qu'est-ce qu'une traduction "relevante"?' in *Quinzième Assises de la traduction littéraire (Arles 1998)*, ed. Claude Ernout and Michel Volkovitch (Paris: Actes Sud, 1999), 21–48; Jacques Derrida, 'What Is a "Relevant" Translation?' trans. Lawrence Venuti, *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 2 (2001): 174–200.

gendered structure, whereby translation plays second, feminized fiddle to the originary, masculine authority of the text from which it derives.<sup>4</sup>

Influential critiques of the ideal of transparent, value-free translation in post-medieval contexts include Lawrence Venuti's analysis of what he terms the translator's 'invisibility' in commercial English-language publishing in Britain and America. As well as exploring the stigmatization of translation in specific situations, Venuti has sought more generally to expound an ethics of translation which shifts attention from ideals such as fluency and transferability (which he suggests continue to inflect translation theory conceived in an empirical or scientific mode) to issues of responsibility and responsiveness to the other.<sup>5</sup> One of the major issues taken up in the present volume, which finds inspiration in the work of theorists such as Venuti and Derrida, concerns translation's ability to negotiate cultural and linguistic difference. For Venuti, modern literary translation is more often than not a fundamentally ethnocentric practice, heavily invested in processes of domestication and assimilation. Against this assimilationist ethos he promotes what he terms 'minoritizing translation', the value of which resides in expressly alerting readers to the domestication process through which a text's 'foreignness' is inevitably filtered; translators working within this alternative model are motivated by the ethical and political goal of building a community with foreign cultures, to share an understanding with and of them and to collaborate on projects founded on that understanding.<sup>6</sup> This rhetoric of domestic and foreign, community and understanding, draws in turn on Antoine Berman's suggestion that the properly ethical aim of translation is to 'recevoir l'Autre en tant qu'Autre' [receive the Foreign as Foreign]; while no translator can escape what Berman describes as the deforming forces of domestication, it is only by accentuating a text's strangeness, its resistance to those homogenizing tendencies, that its status as a repository of difference can be respected.<sup>7</sup> While such ideas have been seminal, they arguably apply to a relatively restricted range of cultural and political circumstances, notably the literary cultures that took

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4 Lori Chamberlain, 'Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2004), 306–21. For an analysis which considers issues of gender as they inflect language use in a postcolonial framework, see also Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'The Politics of Translation', in Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (London: Routledge, 1993), 179–200.

5 Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2008); Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards An Ethics of Difference* (London: Routledge, 1998); Lawrence Venuti, 'Translation, Community, Utopia', in *Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Venuti, 468–88.

6 Venuti, 'Translation, Community, Utopia', 469.

7 Antoine Berman, *La traduction et la lettre, ou L'auberge du lointain* (Paris: Seuil, 1999), 74; Antoine Berman, 'Translation and the Trials of the Foreign', in *Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Venuti, 276–89.

root in western Europe and north America after the end of the Middle Ages. As such, the conceptions of cultural hegemony and the 'foreign' taken up by Venuti and Berman may require qualification when applied to medieval examples, correlating as they do with the kinds of defined geography and political stability that have come to be associated, in modernity, with the notion of a nation state united around a single language.<sup>8</sup> One of the aims of the present volume is to provide a more nuanced perspective on the limits as well as the possibilities of such approaches: translation and translators, situated as they always are in particular times, spaces, histories and political circumstances, may be working with alternative notions of cultural and linguistic difference from those that have arguably taken hold in modern, Westernized contexts such as literary publishing.

Derrida's own take on the question of difference conceives translation as a stage for enacting an ethical relation between languages and cultures. His concept of *différance* rests on the assumption that meaning is always differential/deferred: a site of proliferating possibilities, language exceeds the control of those who use it and is received in multiple and unpredictable ways. This insight has a number of implications for translation theory. First, the idea that a translation can be traced back to some originary source is immediately thrown into question. If the deployment of any word is shot through with *différance*, since to be meaningful it must enter into a logic of iterability (which is to say that it always carries within it the trace of other words and texts), the distinction between 'original' and 'copy' comes unstuck. Here Derrida's radical notion of 'la traduction absolue' [absolute translation], a translation 'sans pôle de référence, sans langue originaire, sans langue de départ' [without a pole of reference, without an originary language, and without a source language], draws attention instead to translation as an ongoing process – rather than as a transaction between source and target languages – and in so doing moves away from the hierarchical structures (such as original/copy, author/translator, sense/word) on which discussions of translation have traditionally depended.<sup>9</sup> Second, the idea of textual fidelity is challenged. The suggestion that meaning can be transferred between languages without being 'harmed' assumes that some sphere of signification ultimately lies beyond or before language; that language is underpinned by a transcendent reference point (which in medieval Christian cultures might include notions of divine truth or the word of God); and that transferability or translatability is an achievable ideal. For this concept of translation as semantic transfer, Derrida submits,

8 For evaluations of Venuti's argument for a resistant translation practice that take issue with its potentially prescriptive and elitist dimensions (notably in the context of a bias towards literary translation), see essays in Maria Tymoczko, ed., *Translation, Resistance, Activism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010).

9 Derrida, *Le monolinguisme de l'autre*, 117; Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 61.

il faudra substituer une notion de *transformation*: transformation réglée d'une langue par une autre, d'un texte par un autre. Nous n'aurons et n'avons en fait jamais eu affaire à quelque 'transport' de signifiés purs que l'instrument – ou le 'véhicule' – signifiant laisserait vierge et inentamé, d'une langue à l'autre.<sup>10</sup>

[we would have to substitute a notion of transformation: a regulated transformation of one language by another, of one text by another. We will never have, and in fact never have had, to do with some 'transport' of pure signifieds from one language to another, or within one and the same language, that the signifying instrument would leave virgin and untouched.]<sup>11</sup>

Third, the acknowledgement that language is a site of difference – that all language use relies on the ability of a given utterance to mean something other than what it signifies in a given context – places a fundamental ethical demand on the work of the translator. On the one hand there comes the duty to translate the other, to bring it into the sphere of recognition (which may be conceived, from Derrida's perspective, as a form of 'hospitality'); yet the other's alterity also remains fundamentally inassimilable, untranslatable in its singularity (which carries with it the risk of inhospitality). This obligation both to translate and not to translate, explored in depth by Derrida in his essay 'Des tours de Babel', implicates the translator in an ethical framework that aspires to resist the ethnocentric tendencies of translation even as it acknowledges their inevitability.<sup>12</sup> As with Berman and Venuti, who oppose the domesticating tendencies of contemporary translation practice while not at the same time discounting the possibility of translation altogether, Derrida is thus concerned to foreground the simultaneous intelligibility and irreducibility of the other.<sup>13</sup>

10 Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1972), 31. Original emphasis.

11 Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 19.

12 Jacques Derrida, 'Des tours de Babel', in *Psyché: Invention de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1998), 203–35; Jacques Derrida, 'Des tours de Babel', trans. Joseph M. Graham, in *Psyche: Invention of the Other*, vol. 1, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 191–225.

13 For overviews of Derrida on language, translation, and the ethics and politics of difference, see Kathleen Davis, *Deconstruction and Translation* (Manchester: St Jerome Publishing, 2001); Kathleen Davis, 'Signature in Translation', in *Traductio: Essays on Punning and Translation*, ed. Dirk Delabastita (Manchester: St Jerome Publishing, 1997), 23–43; Leslie Hill, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jacques Derrida* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Jack Reynolds and Jonathan Roffe, eds, *Understanding Derrida* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 26–45, 103–112; Michael Thomas, *The Reception of Derrida: Translation and Transformation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Lawrence Venuti, 'Translating Derrida on Translation: Relevance and Disciplinary Resistance', *Yale Journal of Criticism* 16, no. 2 (2003): 237–62.

The present volume takes up the question of difference as it concerns translation in a number of ways. In addition to engaging directly with the work of theorists such as Derrida, Berman and Venuti, as well as Walter Benjamin's influential discussion of the original/translation opposition (which itself strongly shapes Derrida's discussion of translatability in 'Des tours de Babel'), individual contributors seek to demonstrate how contemporary reflections on the ethics and politics of translation may need to be refigured or reframed when applied to medieval examples. Religion presents particular issues in this context: Venuti's analysis of the translator's invisibility may have different implications when the divine agency behind translation is brought into focus; Benjamin's reflections on the sacred dimensions of history usefully chime with medieval understandings of translation as a site of unresolved conflict between sacral power and human limitation, but rely on assumptions about the status and valuation of the 'original' that medieval translators were not necessarily always working with themselves; Derrida's interrogation of the concept of 'relevance' in translation, which he sees at work in the interplay between religious conversion, economic substitution and mediation in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, potentially has a different significance when brought into dialogue with the expanded medieval sense of *translatio* as non-textual, non-linguistic transfer (as in the translation of holy objects such as relics). The somewhat more limited and controlled modes of semantic transfer that have come to be associated with translation in modernity – notably the idea that the source text holds authority and determines translation choices, and that some element in this authoritative 'original', imbued with sacred value, can be carried over to the place of reception – is, as Maria Tymoczko has demonstrated, a translation norm and metaphor that became prominent in western Europe only towards the end of the Middle Ages and one that has continued to be used as a means of imposing colonial, political and commercial authority up until the present day.<sup>14</sup> Just as, in Tymoczko's view, the models of translation derived from these predominantly Eurocentric (and implicitly Christocentric) perspectives should not be taken as the basis for international translation theories in a period of globalization, so too a reflection on the long history of the notion of translation as transfer, which interrogates how, in medieval Christian societies, translation and sacredness became progressively intertwined as a means of maintaining ecclesiastical authority, helpfully underscores the need for an ethics of translation that is self-reflexive about its past and about the modernist assumptions on which it has sometimes relied.

Other issues taken up in this volume, which have likewise received attention in contemporary translation theory, include the theme of hospitality and

14 Maria Tymoczko, 'Western Metaphorical Discourses Implicit in Translation Studies', in *Thinking Through Translation with Metaphors*, ed. James St André (Manchester: St Jerome Publishing, 2010), 109–43; Maria Tymoczko, *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators* (Manchester: St Jerome Publishing, 2007).

inhospitality (how, for example, does translation accommodate the differences of other cultures?); the ability of translations to contest their sources (how might the dissemination of a given text or story present a challenge to its political or moral message?); the role of translator as interpreter (what position might translators have in conflict situations, for instance?); and the limits of translation as a category (what is the difference between translating a text and rewriting or adapting it, or altering its form?). In addition, rethinking medieval translation potentially requires an expansion of what is meant by 'translation' to include neglected aspects of textual and linguistic practice in the period, such as the transformation of verse forms into prose or the interplay between text and image. Inherent to an ethics of translation as defined by theorists such as Venuti is a notion of translation as appropriation; but attention to the varied and multiple ways in which stories are adapted, altered, redacted and expanded in different media and forms can also serve to bring into focus a more complex picture of dissemination and cultural transmission.<sup>15</sup> The remainder of this Introduction provides an overview of existing medieval translation scholarship, particularly as it concerns these themes, as well as suggesting ways in which medieval and modern translation studies might be brought into a mutually beneficial dialogue with one another along these lines. This is followed by a summary of individual contributions that draws out some of the issues of ethics, politics and theory on which this volume is focused.

### Medieval Studies and Translation Theory

Translation is a well-established area of research in medieval studies that continues to attract a great deal of scholarly attention. Edited collections have played a vital role in exploring this territory and there is a substantial body of scholarship of this kind examining translation as a pragmatic or creative practice. The Medieval Translator volumes published from 1989 to the present set the tone for much subsequent scholarship (particularly, though not exclusively, in English) regarding such questions as the relationship between an original and a copy, issues of textual fidelity, the hierarchy between Latin and the vernacular and the use of different models of translation in particular texts or groups of texts.<sup>16</sup> Extending the focus on translation practices, other

15 See, for example, Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2006), which rejects the morally loaded concept of fidelity in adaptation studies, and implicitly also the notion of an ethics of translation aimed simply at critiquing its appropriative dimensions, in favour of treating adaptations as *adaptations* – a series of equivalent, palimpsestic expressions that are 'second without being secondary' (9).

16 Roger Ellis, with Jocelyn Price, Stephen Medcalf and Peter Meredith, eds, *The Medieval Translator: The Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge:



collections have paid close attention to questions of fidelity and innovation by examining, for example, the notion of the *fidus interpres* or considering the question of fidelity in the broader context of cultural change.<sup>17</sup>

Work of this kind has sometimes considered theoretical questions – notably in connection with medieval Latin and vernacular ‘literary theory’ – but it has more often favoured the close examination of practice over more theoretical concerns.<sup>18</sup> Since the 1990s, this more empirical approach has been supplemented by a number of studies which examine translation as a means of establishing or unsettling relations of cultural dominance and subservience. One of the most influential examples of this approach is Rita Copeland’s study of the ideological nexus of history, authority and power in which commentary and vernacular translation operated.<sup>19</sup> Copeland examines the relationship between translation and interpretation in medieval Latin culture and its influence on vernacular writings in Middle English by authors such

D. S. Brewer, 1989); Roger Ellis, ed., *The Medieval Translator 2* (London: Queen Mary and Westfield College, 1991); Roger Ellis, ed., *Translation in the Middle Ages* (The Medieval Translator 3), special issue of *New Comparison: A Journal of Comparative and General Literary Studies* 12 (1991); Roger Ellis and Ruth Evans, eds, *The Medieval Translator 4* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1994); Roger Ellis and René Tixier, eds, *The Medieval Translator 5* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996); Roger Ellis, René Tixier and Bernd Weitemeire, eds, *The Medieval Translator 6* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998).

17 Peter Anderson, ed., *Pratiques de traduction au Moyen Âge: Actes du colloque de l’université de Copenhague 25 et 26 octobre 2002* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2004); Kathy Cawsey and Jason Harris, eds, *Transmission and Transformation in the Middle Ages: Texts and Contexts* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2007). Though many such collections focus on biblical or literary translation, scientific and medical texts have also been the subject of some attention. See Jacqueline Hamesse and Marta Fattori, eds, *Rencontres de cultures dans la philosophie médiévale: Traductions et traducteurs de l’Antiquité tardive au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle. Actes du Colloque international de Cassino 15–17 juin 1989, organisé par la Société Internationale pour l’Étude de la philosophie médiévale et l’Università degli Studi di Cassino* (Louvain-la-Neuve/Cassino: Institut d’Études Médiévales, 1990). In addition to the collections already mentioned, see Geneviève Contamine, *Traduction et traducteurs au Moyen Âge: Actes du colloque international du CNRS organisé à Paris, Institut de recherche et d’histoire des textes les 26–28 mai 1986* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1989). Maurice Pergnier’s introduction to this volume (xiii–xxiii) was an early call for consideration of a greater diversity of translation practices beyond biblical and literary translation.

18 See, for example, Anderson, ed., *Pratiques de traduction au Moyen Âge*. See also Jeanette Beer, ed., *Translation Theory and Practice in the Middle Ages* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, 1997); it should be noted that this volume is interested primarily in medieval theories of translation; discussions of translation in contemporary literary theory are not interrogated explicitly for the most part.

19 Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*. See also Alistair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, 2nd edn (Aldershot: Wildwood, 1988).

as Chaucer and Gower. By bringing into focus the importance of the *translatio studii* and *translatio imperii* topoi to medieval understandings of the relationship between past and present cultures, she shows how the transmission of literary texts in the Middle Ages is related to the transfer of power and authority between cultures. In so doing, she explores the peculiar cultural dynamics at the heart of such an enterprise: if, on one level, the model of *translatio studii et imperii* implies dependency on and endorsement of Latin culture on the part of vernacular writers, on another level, it has the power to displace the very authority it cites.

Collections and anthologies have, following Copeland's work, considered some of the possible limitations of the *translatio studii et imperii* model for approaching medieval vernacular translation in its entirety. This approach – which has emerged most strongly in scholarship on medieval Britain – is associated with the challenging of historical narratives of the 'rise' of European vernacular languages and with arguments for greater attentiveness to the specific cultural and linguistic contexts in which vernacular writers were operating. Thus, in addition to examining how the theory and practice of vernacular writing is tied to the question of its relation to Latin, work produced in Copeland's wake considers how the issues of cultural dominance that she outlines might be approached in other ways, in connection with a broader understanding of vernacular translation and the contexts in which it operated. *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory 1280–1520* is an important intervention in this regard.<sup>20</sup> As part of its presentation of Middle English discussions of literary practice, this anthology seeks to challenge the notion that status with regard to Latin was what was primarily at stake in the emergence of vernacular literature. Instead, it is argued, Middle English writers were concerned with issues other than authority and drew (often quite pragmatically) on a wider range of sources than the *translatio studii* model allows. Thus, for all the importance of Latin frames of reference in the prologues reproduced in the anthology, Latin theorizing is, it is claimed, often too far removed from the contexts in which vernacular literature is produced to provide a key to understanding such texts. What this critique implies is not an abandonment of Copeland's model, but rather a qualification of its applicability to all writing in the vernacular. The evidence of Middle English writers suggests that such a model is most compellingly applied to self-conscious contributions to high literary culture which attempt to valorize vernacular language alongside Latin.

More recent work on the study of translation has developed this line of enquiry by considering relations not only between Latin and vernacular languages but also between vernaculars. This is reflected at the level of indi-

20 Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor and Ruth Evans, eds, *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory 1280–1520* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999).

vidual contributions in some of the collections already mentioned; more recently, however, this approach has become associated with a broader analysis of vernacular culture that considers it in local and multilingual contexts as well as in national terms. The editors' call for greater attention to the regional contexts and points of dissemination for translation in the most recent of the *Medieval Translator* volumes is indicative of a way of thinking that not only considers the multilingual contexts in which translation often took place but also looks beyond national cultures and their relationship to Latin.<sup>21</sup> One of the most important recent collections to develop such an approach is *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England c. 1100–1500*, which critiques long-held assumptions in modern political historiography and scholarship regarding the relationship between French and English in Britain.<sup>22</sup> This volume is significant for the range of texts it includes as well as its reassessment of narratives of linguistic dominance and decline. As Jocelyn Wogan-Browne points out in her editor's introduction, the construction of nationalizing literary canons has tended to skew the picture of how languages interact in medieval texts; widening the net to include less studied material suggests that linguistic permeability, code-switching and other phenomena currently studied as part of a contemporary interest in multilingualism may be more culturally widespread than medievalists had previously thought.<sup>23</sup> This re-examination of what has often been treated as a monoglot English culture from a perspective that pays closer attention to the multilingual contexts in which it developed has some important implications for thinking about medieval translation. For one, the collection suggests that, as a result of the multilingual networks in which they are written and received, medieval texts are never truly monolingual.<sup>24</sup> The languages of apparently monoglot medieval texts are always in dialogue with other languages and this can take a variety of forms ranging from authorization to subversion. A second point concerns the nature of translation itself: not only is it a pervasive cultural practice and central part of medieval aesthetics, but translation is undertaken in a wide variety of more or less visible ways.

Scholars working on other European cultural traditions have come to

21 Denis Renevey and Christiania Whitehead, eds, *Lost in Translation? The Medieval Translator/Traduire au Moyen Âge 12* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009)

22 Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, with Carolyn Collette, Maryanne Kowaleski, Linne Mooney, Ad Putter and David Trotter, eds, *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England c. 1100–c. 1500* (York: York Medieval Press, 2009).

23 Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'General Introduction: What's in a Name? The "French" of "England"', in *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain*, 1–13.

24 See also Michelle Warren, 'Translation' in *Middle English*, ed. Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 51–67, who also explores how translation can be said to operate even in the absence of multiple languages.

similar conclusions.<sup>25</sup> Alison Cornish's study of vulgarizing translation in Dante's Italy, for instance, challenges the notion that translation of this sort replaces the source text, arguing that, while commentary may sometimes substitute itself for a source, vernacular translations in Italy remain ancillary and mobile.<sup>26</sup> Catherine Léglu's exploration of the relationships between Occitan, Catalan and French in later medieval verse and prose texts from the Occitan tradition also re-examines the complex pathways that translation often took, while demonstrating the intricate relationships between multilingualism and the fantasy of the 'mother tongue' in such texts.<sup>27</sup> Thus, in addition to reframing questions of linguistic and cultural contact as these affect vernacular literary culture, work such as this also suggests that medieval translation may be productively re-examined using more flexible, less prescriptive models from those that have traditionally dominated the field.

Another way in which the study of medieval translation has evolved – and which addresses the issues just described in other ways – is in the direction of a postcolonial analysis. Though postcolonial scholarship within medieval studies has not always addressed linguistic issues, postcolonial approaches have proved a useful way of introducing and thinking through some of the questions generated by an alternative, expanded approach to the theory and practice of translation. Writing in the aforementioned *Idea of the Vernacular* volume, Ruth Evans suggests ways in which the *translatio studii et imperii* model that the anthology sought to problematize in other ways might productively be approached from a postcolonial angle.<sup>28</sup> In addition to the study by Léglu just mentioned, Ardis Butterfield's work has provided a more extensive investigation of the possible uses of postcolonial criticism for rethinking narratives of linguistic and cultural contact in medieval Britain during the Hundred Years War.<sup>29</sup> In a way that is similarly informed by postcolonial models, Sharon Kinoshita's work, though not primarily focused on translation, has addressed related questions of linguistic and cultural interaction as

25 Though not specifically considering translation, the collection of essays edited by Busby and Kleinhenz on multilingualism in the medieval francophone world explores relationships between languages in areas of the francophone world outside England. See Keith Busby and Chris Kleinhenz, eds, *Medieval Multilingualism: The Francophone World and Its Neighbours* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010).

26 Alison Cornish, *Vernacular Translation in Dante's Italy: Illiterate Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

27 Catherine Léglu, *Multilingualism and Mother Tongue in Medieval French, Occitan and Catalan Narratives* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).

28 Ruth Evans, 'Historicizing Postcolonial Criticism: Cultural Difference and the Vernacular', in *The Idea of the Vernacular*, 366–70. See also Evans, 'Translating Past Cultures?'

29 Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language and Nation in the Hundred Years War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

part of her rethinking of Old French literary production in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>30</sup>

One edited collection that has explored the relationship between postcolonial theory and translation in a medieval European context is *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages: Translating Cultures*, which adopts translation as a metaphor for the ways in which the multilingual, multicultural dimensions of the Middle Ages might carry across to postcolonial analyses of cultural transmission.<sup>31</sup> Adopting the notion of 'translation-as-wonder' – defined as the experience of decentring that occurs during moments of cultural encounter – individual essays in this collection focus on the idea of the Middle Ages itself as a site for the production of empathy, displacement and wonderment. Although not problematizing translation in the same way as *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain*, this collection nonetheless works with an expanded notion of what translation might involve and advocates an approach that allows for greater cross-fertilization in scholarship dealing with such phenomena in medieval and modern contexts.

More generally, regardless of whether or not this involves explicit engagement with postcolonial models, medievalists have been refining and rethinking the categories of analysis with which translation might be thought as well as expanding the range of practices that the term potentially covers. This has often followed broadly similar lines to the discussion of translation within the social sciences in recent decades, which has extended the use of the term from primarily linguistic uses to other areas of cultural production, enabling it to function as an explanatory metaphor for practices through which the transformation of cultural forms takes place. A recent example of this in literary contexts is Alastair Minnis's exploration of the ways in which authority was 'translated' in Middle English literature.<sup>32</sup> Other studies have gone further in paying greater attention to the relationship between material culture and translation as it is thought in connection with textual cultures. In addition to some of the work already mentioned, which considers the materiality of medieval textual cultures as part of investigation of translation and multilingualism, there is a developing body of scholarship that investigates translation as a cultural phenomenon which incorporates but is not confined to texts. The 2009 volume of the *Medieval Translator* series ends with a section entitled 'Beyond Translation', in which a number of contributors expand traditional notions of translation in order to examine various

30 Sharon Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

31 Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deanne Williams, eds, *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages: Translating Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

32 Alastair Minnis, *Translations of Authority in Medieval English Literature: Valuing the Vernacular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

forms of iconographic or material transmission and transposition.<sup>33</sup> Finbarr B. Flood's *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval 'Hindu-Muslim' Encounter* is a more extended attempt to think medieval translation with and through material culture.<sup>34</sup>

As suggested by this necessarily schematic overview, the scope and methodological shifts that have taken place in this field over the past few decades make this an exciting time to be working on medieval translation. Given the current state of play, this is also, we believe, a perfect moment to revisit the relationship between translation theory and translation practice from an ethical and political standpoint. The diversification of approaches to medieval translation and the reconceptualization of the categories through which it is defined encourage a rethinking of the ethical and political frameworks within which medieval translation has traditionally been discussed. This, indeed, is already implicit in the way the model of *translatio studii et imperii* has been critically revisited by scholars looking at various aspects of European vernacular culture. Copeland's discussion of vernacular translation as a practice that both deferred to and displaced the authority of Latin continues to offer important insights into how vernacular translators conceived of their work and has been widely used by medievalists studying translation. However, as discussed above, the model also has some shortcomings insofar as it regards vernacular translation exclusively in relation to Latin culture rather than applying it to medieval translation practice in its entirety. Rethinking the cultural dominance of Latin and paying closer attention to the situatedness of medieval translation in the way that other studies have proposed suggest that the ethical and political dynamics of the models associated with this approach require similar kinds of qualification or refinement. One of the aims of the present book is to focus greater attention on precisely this issue.

The decision to address explicitly theoretical questions alongside more historical issues is quite deliberate and distinguishes this volume from collections which have explored related areas. As mentioned earlier, collections such as those in the Medieval Translator series have tended to focus on practice rather than theory and do not usually explicitly address broader methodological issues. Postcolonial approaches to the study of the Middle Ages, while offering important theoretical insights into cultural contact, have only rarely focused on translation per se. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's edited book *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* was the first volume to take an explicitly postcolonial approach to medieval culture and looks productively at areas of intersection and potential dialogue between medieval and postcolonial studies.<sup>35</sup> However,

33 Renevey and Whitehead, eds, *Lost in Translation?*

34 Finbarr B. Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval 'Hindu-Muslim' Encounter* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

35 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000).

emphasis tends to be placed on Middle English texts at the expense of other linguistic situations, meaning that issues of translation are not consistently pushed to the fore. Kabir and Williams' *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages* widens the linguistic and temporal net to include material in Old English, Old French and fifteenth-century Spanish, but several of the essays still focus mainly on the literary cultures of late medieval England. *Rethinking Medieval Translation* complements such studies by suggesting how questions of difference, cultural dominance and political exploitation raised as part of a postcolonial critique of medieval cultures might usefully be re-posed and rethought as part of an investigation of the ethics and politics of translation. Though the primary emphasis of our collection remains for the most part on European languages, individual contributors discuss English, French and Latin writings as they enter into a dialogue with Arabic, Catalan, Greek, Italian and Occitan cultures.

As our outline of the scholarship suggests, this is a huge field. This book is an attempt neither at a complete overview of translation in a particular period, nor at a study of translation as it relates to a particular language or region. Though other collections have productively taken this approach, the aim of this volume is instead to provoke new ways of thinking and theorizing translation that might critically inform further research of this sort. Alongside studies focusing on particular literary traditions or geographical areas such as those already mentioned, there is also room for comparative work that thinks through the methodological issues raised by translation and multilingualism in different cultural contexts – comparing the 'French of England', for example, with the situation in Franco-Italian literary culture, or considering individual authors whose writing career follows a truly multilingual trajectory (such as Ramon Llull). This work raises a number of important methodological questions. For instance, one issue that emerges strongly from the volume is the need to rethink the contexts in which medieval translation takes place and the categories – such as language, geography and text – on which it relies. Scholars also need to re-evaluate critically some of the hierarchies between languages with which medievalists are used to working, especially those between Latin and vernacular cultures. Finally, the way translation is situated through its relationship to place, travel and border zones of cultural contact is hugely important when it comes to thinking about the relations between languages and cultures; while not devaluing a more traditional focus on texts, such an approach draws attention to human dimensions of linguistic and cultural contact that deserve far greater attention.

Though this collection has theoretical ambitions, it should be emphasized that it is not an attempt to come up with a universal theory or single approach to medieval translation; in this respect, it follows the lead of much of the work already mentioned, which insists on the close relationship between theory and practice when thinking about translation. The book's aim is rather to begin a conversation about how medieval translation and the ethical and

political questions it raises might productively be explored from perspectives that incorporate but are not limited to postcolonial models. Each of the contributions to *Rethinking Medieval Translation* offers what we hope are some helpful vantage points from which to reflect on such approaches.

### Overview of the Collection

The first four essays explore different aspects of the ethics and politics of *translatio studii*. Marilynn Desmond's essay concentrates on Leonzio Pilatus (d. 1365), whose encounters with Petrarch and Boccaccio – neither of whom were able to read Greek but who responded in contrasting ways to Pilatus's attempts to translate Homeric epics from Greek into Latin – illustrate the complexity of issues of language, identity and difference as these related to the performance of translation. Pilatus's story functions as a kind of allegorical response to the political and ethical questions raised in *Rethinking Medieval Translation* as a whole: the themes of hospitality/inhospitality and cultural difference (as discussed by theorists such as Berman, Derrida and Venuti) map onto the contrasting responses to translation formulated by Boccaccio and Petrarch, responses that were themselves inflected by medieval attitudes to antique culture.

Miranda Griffin's chapter pushes the focus on the translation of antique texts and languages in another direction, by concentrating on the dialogue between French and Latin as it is played out in the exchange between the *Ovide moralisé* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In so doing, Griffin also demonstrates how more traditional approaches to thinking about text and source in this context might be brought into dialogue with Derrida's ideas on language and translation in his 'Des tours de Babel' essay. Just as Derrida exploits figures of virgin birth, incarnation and wedding garments in his theories, the *Ovide moralisé* transforms the unstable pre-Christian body of the *Metamorphoses* into an avatar of the Incarnation, the Virgin Birth and holy matrimony. Yet whereas these impossible, sacred bodies underwrite the Christian faith which illuminates the *Metamorphoses* for the author of the *Ovide moralisé*, for Derrida they figure the impossibility and limit of translation and the transfiguration of figural language itself.

Continuing the focus on medieval translations of classical culture, Catherine Léglu explores translation's relationship to interpretation and ethics, taking an approach that complements Desmond's and Griffin's considerations of the ethical implications of translation as a form of interpretation. Léglu's argument uses as a touchstone Mieke Bal's notion of 'ethical non-indifference', which Bal defines as the refusal of readers or viewers to suppress their distaste for the ideological content of a work of art usually studied for its aesthetic value alone. Arguing that no version of the Lucretia tale, whether written or visual, is indifferent to the ethics that it teaches in both political and domestic



life, Léglu demonstrates how translations may point to the ethical non-indifference of some of the tale's medieval readers.

Noah Guynn's contribution offers another perspective on *translatio studii*, this time focusing on the way translation is implicated in the formation of the ethical and political categories that we apply to premodern texts and cultures. Guynn's focus is on the politics of carnival as this is reflected in early drama and the anachronism of applying a modern notion of catharsis in this context. This argument hinges on a careful reconsideration of the medieval transmission of Aristotle's *Poetics*, the source of the notion of catharsis as moral cleansing or 'purgation'. Arguing against the claim that farce uses comic catharsis to circumscribe social and political forms of dissent, Guynn demonstrates how, contrary to modern notions of catharsis as purification, the understanding of catharsis mediated by medieval translations of Aristotle associates it with the use of passions to inspire greater virtue in already virtuous men. This, in turn, has implications for how we understand the politics of carnival in the Middle Ages: rather than functioning as spaces for the quelling of social unrest through shared catharsis, medieval drama had the capacity to provoke meaningful political action and social change.

Emma Campbell's essay, like those by Griffin, Robert Mills and Jane Gilbert, explores translation's relationship to the sacred. Campbell explores the various ways in which *translatio* in Rutebeuf's *Miracle de Théophile* is implicated in divine and diabolical relations, as well as relations between the text's audience and the divine. As part of this exploration, the essay revisits an issue that has caused bafflement amongst critics: the transformation of Théophile's charter into a letter from the devil. Drawing on Derrida's discussion of the concept of 'relevance' in translation, Campbell proposes that the transformation of Théophile's charter into an open letter from the devil in Rutebeuf's version of the *Miracle* is ultimately connected to the text's valorization of a particular model of *translatio* – a model that is ultimately best served by French (rather than other possible alternatives, such as Latin).

In the chapter that follows, Mills explores another area of dialogue between modern ways of thinking of the ethics of translation and medieval textual and cultural practices. Complementing the focus on the interconnectedness of interpretation and translation in other essays (especially Griffin and Léglu), Mills looks more explicitly at the translator – a figure whose 'invisibility' has been identified as a major ethical dilemma in recent translation theory. Venuti identifies 'fluent' translation techniques in modern, English-language translation as one of the means by which the translator's labour becomes hidden from view, encouraging attitudes that he claims are imperialistic and xenophobic. Focusing on the motif of language as it gets transmitted in a number of medieval and post-medieval retellings of the story of Thomas Becket's 'heathen' mother, Mills considers the medieval stakes in this scenario of invisible translation by asking what ideological values the translator's in/visibility is asked to serve. Moving from thirteenth-century hagiographic retellings of

the legend in Middle English to visual renditions produced in later centuries, as well as surveying a number of post-medieval versions, Mills demonstrates both the relevance and limitations of Venuti's arguments about translation when they are applied to medieval contexts.

Zrinka Stahuljak's essay, like Desmond's, considers translation as part of the interactions between individuals as well as among languages, cultures and texts – interactions that have important political as well as ethical dimensions. Also complementing Mills's discussion of the translator's visibility, the chapter focuses on translation and interpretation as activities involving human agents. In translation studies, 'fixers' perform a range of duties as local informants, guides or negotiators that exceed interpretation and/or translation. Drawing upon a range of texts in which medieval interpreters come into view in conflict situations, Stahuljak demonstrates how productive the modern concept of the 'fixer' can be for reading medieval scenes of translation and interpretation, opening as it does a hitherto unstudied window onto medieval political, social and ethical encounters in the contact zone. The chapter thus both addresses an issue not traditionally included in discussions of medieval translation and also explores another important area of potential dialogue between modern translation studies and research on medieval literature and culture.

Like Stahuljak, Gilbert considers an aspect of medieval practice that has been largely omitted from traditional discussions of translation as something that takes place between texts in different languages. Gilbert's focus is fifteenth-century works that claim to 'translate' older French verse into prose: the prosifications by medieval *dérimeurs* (literally 'de-rhymers'). These somewhat sidelined works – which have been read primarily as documents in the history of culture – are here brought into dialogue with one of the most widely known touchstones of contemporary translation theory: Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator' (1921). By comparing these different bodies of work, Gilbert demonstrates how Benjamin's essay opens up ways of thinking about the fifteenth-century texts' importance as translations and how the fifteenth-century material permits us to push certain points in Benjamin's essay in other directions, notably with respect to the relations that Benjamin posits between theology and history. In both Benjamin's essay and the *dérimeurs'* presentations, an orientation towards the sacred dimension of 'history' is balanced by an insistence on translation's location within human time. Anchored in transience, the translation is always liable to be superseded; it thus falls to translators to capture both timeliness and transience, and in doing so they make manifest the greater, sacred dimension of history.

William Burgwinkle, like Stahuljak and Gilbert, investigates another aspect of medieval textual and linguistic practice that challenges medievalists to rethink what medieval 'translation' might include. Burgwinkle's argument focuses on the multilingual writer Ramon Llull (d. 1313), who wrote texts simultaneously in Catalan, Occitan, Latin, Arabic, French and Italian. The

question raised by Lull's work is whether this multilingualism constitutes an act of translation. Where does rewriting stop and translation begin? Is there (always) an original that is being translated from? Derrida's questioning of the notion of an 'original' language finds strong support in Lull's example, as Burgwinkle demonstrates. The chapter examines Lull's attitudes towards human speech and translation before turning to the mediation of Lull's life story itself, in an illuminated manuscript produced in collaboration with Lull called the *Breviculum*, which sheds light on the visual as well as verbal dimensions of translation, language and agency in this context.

Butterfield's chapter, like those by a number of other contributors (notably Burgwinkle, Desmond and Stahuljak), explores the relationship between languages as they were spoken, thought and learnt as well as written down in the Middle Ages. It also – like Luke Sunderland's contribution – considers the implications of revising a linguistic picture associated with the historical development of national languages: in Butterfield's case, the status of vernacular languages in late medieval England. Butterfield's essay develops new research on the parallel vernacular role played in England by French. Through discussion of the work of Charles d'Orléans, Lydgate and Hoccleve it investigates these works as a form of bilingual translation which may be more or less 'rough' or 'smooth'. In evaluating this material, Butterfield draws on modern discussions of fluency in translation studies and postcolonial studies, which is an issue that has been at the centre of many debates on the ethics of translation and postcolonial writing.

Sunderland develops the focus on multilingualism seen in the previous two essays in relation to what is often seen as a quintessentially 'French' literary genre: the *chanson de geste*. Calling into question the notion that France is the 'home' of the *chanson de geste*, Sunderland's chapter highlights the importance of dissemination, rewriting and translation in the genre's history. Deploying as a case study the various recastings of *Bueve d'Hantone* (also known, in differing incarnations, as *Bevis of Hampton* and *Bovo d'Antona*), Sunderland shows how contemporary translation theory – specifically Berman's notion of translation as hospitality, and Venuti's analysis of translation through the logic of commodity – can shed light on the text's complex circulation history in the Middle Ages. Whereas the plurality and difference of surviving *chanson de geste* manuscripts led philologists to invent an idea of the original (which always ended up being 'French'), in the case of *Bueve d'Hantone/Bovo d'Antona* the margins can be seen to displace the centre; ideas of a 'home' for the genre are ultimately called into question, in a text that promotes ideals of travel and displacement rather than fixity and the maintenance of boundaries. Although the *Bueve* texts fail ultimately to fulfil the utopian ideal of translation promoted by Berman and Venuti, in that there is no absolute openness to the difference of another culture in any of the surviving versions, Sunderland shows how (as in Mills's analysis of the Becket narrative) dissemination affords opportunities to glimpse this ethical model sideways on.

The collection concludes with a response by Simon Gaunt, which both enlarges upon the themes of the volume and explores the problems and opportunities raised by an issue that many of the essays deal with indirectly: that of untranslatability. Gaunt is concerned to shift the debate more explicitly towards this issue and towards the challenges that the untranslatable poses to teaching as well as research. Drawing on Derrida's discussion of Babel, he examines the untranslatability of the proper noun using examples from Wace's *Roman de Brut* and Marco Polo's *Le devisement du monde*, arguing that the untranslatable may itself be regarded as an ethical category – and even an ethical necessity.

The contributions to this volume thus all take a fresh look at the ethics and politics of translation from different theoretical, cultural and linguistic perspectives. What we offer here is not a comprehensive survey of medieval translation practices, or indeed a single theory of medieval translation. Rather, this volume presents a sample of the diversity of medieval *translatio* designed to provoke reflection and debate on issues relevant to the study of translation in the Middle Ages and beyond. The vibrancy of current research on translation within and outside the medieval period makes this a perfect moment to explore new avenues of enquiry and, in so doing, to rethink some of the frameworks underpinning more traditional approaches to medieval translation. This book is, we hope, just the beginning of one such rethinking.